



# Southeast Fishery Bulletin

National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, 9721 Executive Center Drive N., St. Petersburg, FL 33702

## FOR INFORMATION CONTACT:

Steve Branstetter or Steve.Branstetter@noaa.gov  
727-570-5305, FAX 727-570-5583  
<http://caldera.sero.nmfs.gov>

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

September 26, 2003  
NR03-042

### *Fishery Management Plan for the Dolphin and Wahoo Fishery of the Atlantic Available for Public Review and Comment*

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC), in cooperation with the Mid-Atlantic and New England Fishery Management Councils, has submitted the Dolphin and Wahoo Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for review, approval, and implementation by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries). If implemented through subsequent rulemaking, the FMP would establish the following measures:

- the management unit and stock status criteria for dolphin and wahoo;
- permitting and reporting requirements;
- harvesting restrictions;
- designations of essential fish habitat (EFH) and habitat areas of particular concern (HAPCs); and
- a framework procedure that would allow implementing certain regulations through an abbreviated rulemaking process.

NOAA Fisheries is requesting comments from the public regarding the FMP. Written comments must be received on or before **November 25, 2003**. Comments received after that date will not be considered by NOAA Fisheries in their decisions regarding the approval of the FMP. See the **Addresses** section at the end of this bulletin for information on where and how to submit comments.

#### **Summary of FMP Actions**

In developing this FMP, the SAFMC has specific objectives to adopt a precautionary and risk-adverse approach to management. The SAFMC is concerned about rising catches in both the recreational and commercial fisheries, and with this FMP, intends to stabilize the fisheries at their current levels. Neither the dolphin or wahoo stock is overfished nor approaching an overfished condition because of

overfishing. The goals and objectives of the FMP attempt to address social and economic issues in the dolphin and wahoo fisheries along the Atlantic coast.

Management Unit: The FMP would establish a management unit for dolphin and wahoo as that portion of their respective stocks found in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) along the U.S. Atlantic coast from Maine through the east coast of Florida.

Stock Status Criteria: The FMP would establish values for maximum sustainable yield and optimum yield. The status of the stocks in regards to these targets would be monitored by designating both a maximum fishing mortality threshold to determine if overfishing was occurring, and a minimum stock size threshold to determine if the stocks were overfished.

Dealer, Vessel, and Operator Permits: Dealers and owners of commercial and for-hire vessels would be required to obtain federal permits from NOAA Fisheries to participate in the fishery, and to report their landing transactions. The qualifying criteria to obtain a vessel permit would establish a limited access system. These actions are intended to develop more accurate counts of the number of vessels in the fishery, their catch, and their landings.

Operators of a commercial or for-hire vessel would be required to obtain a federal operator permit from NOAA Fisheries to participate in the fishery. The intent of the action is to develop a better understanding about who is participating in the fishery, and to make vessel operators more accountable for complying with fishery regulations.

Harvesting Restrictions: To maintain a healthy stock the FMP would establish numerous harvesting

restrictions, including: (1) no sale provisions for the recreational fishery; (2) recreational bag limits; (3) commercial trip limits; (4) minimum size limits for dolphin; (5) allowable gears and specific gear prohibitions; and (6) a non-binding allocation between commercial and recreational fisheries. Please refer to the FMP for specific information regarding these harvesting restrictions.

EFH and EFH-HAPC: To ensure that adequate habitat is available for maintaining healthy stocks of dolphin and wahoo, the SAFMC would designate several areas as EFH, including the Gulf Stream where it occurs in the EEZ, the Charleston Gyre, and pelagic Sargassum habitat. EFH-HAPCs would be designated at specific geographic regions between North Carolina and Florida.

#### **Addresses**

The FMP, which includes an Environmental Impact Statement, an Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis (IRFA), a Regulatory Impact Review (RIR), a Social Impact Assessment, and a Fishery Impact Statement, is available from:

South Atlantic Management Council  
One Southpark Circle, Suite 306  
Charleston, SC 29407-4699  
Phone: 843-571-4366; fax: 843-769-4520  
e-mail: [safmc@safmc.net](mailto:safmc@safmc.net)

NOAA Fisheries prepared a "Supplemental Economic Analysis, Regulatory Impact Review and Regulatory Flexibility Act Analysis" that augments the findings of the FMP's IRFA/RIR. This supplemental analysis is available from: Fisheries Economics Office, Southeast Regional Office, NMFS, 9721 Executive Center Drive N., St. Petersburg, FL 33702.

Comments on the FMP, due on or before **November 25, 2003**, must be mailed to: Steve Branstetter, Ph.D., Southeast Regional Office, NMFS, 9721 Executive Center Drive N., St. Petersburg, FL 33702

Comments may also be sent via fax to 727-570-5583. Comments will not be accepted if submitted via e-mail or Internet.

All comments received will be considered by NOAA Fisheries in its decision to approve, disapprove, or partially approve the FMP. All comments received by NOAA Fisheries on the FMP will be addressed in any final rule that is published to implement the actions proposed in the FMP.

This and other news releases are available on the Southeast Regional Office homepage at <http://caldera.sero.nmfs.gov/>.

NOAA Fisheries is an agency of the Department of Commerce.